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Sea wall study tests the waters

LONG BEACH - No one made waves at the first study workshop on the proposed breakwater reconfiguration project.

By Joe Segura, Shore Patrol

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LONG BEACH - No one made waves at the first study workshop on the proposed breakwater reconfiguration project.

The workshop was at the Belmont Plaza Pool, within jogging distance of the peninsula - an area where many residents worry that their beachfront homes might be washed away if the breakwater is modified.

That concern was not raised Wednesday night, at least not to the gathering of about 100.

However, the participants did divide into small group discussions - and it's not clear whether the concern for beachfront homes surfaced.

The breakwater protects the city's coast. It was built in the 1940s to protect Navy ships in the Port of Long Beach and the Port of Los Angeles.

However, environmentalists have focused on the degraded offshore water - spoiled in great part by the pollution dumped into our area by the Los Angeles River - and pushed for a study.

The council approved a \$100,000 contract in June to conduct the study to see if there is a federal interest in changing the breakwater.

Tom Modica, Long Beach's manager of government affairs, reminded the participants that the "community input is going to be critical" to the process.

Workshops are also set for Oct. 29 at Long Beach Gas & Oil, 2400 E. Spring St.; and Nov. 19 at the Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific, 100 Aquarium Way. Both are set for 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

No workshops are set for west or north sides of the city, but Modica said the city staff is attempting to work within the \$100,000 study budget, adding that study workshops are typically just one session.

"We can't get to everybody's neighborhood," he said Thursday.

Modica noted that the study is the "first step in answering the community's questions about the impact and role of the Long Beach breakwater, and could help determine the future of the city's coastal areas."

The federal government, workshop organizers said, would need to assess the level of interest and support for the breakwater.

Robert Palmer, chairman of the Long Beach chapter of the Surfrider Foundation, said he thought the study workshop went well.

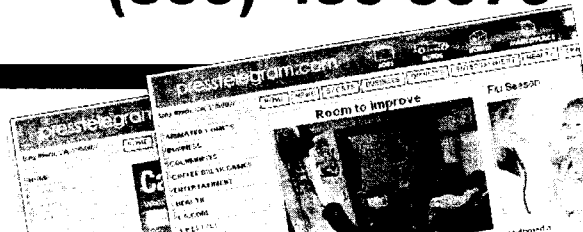
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"I was impressed," he said Thursday, adding that workshops often aren't big draws.

Modica said the engineering study would be conducted by Long Beach-based Moffatt & Nichol. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will review it.

A feasibility study would then be conducted.

"We're in uncharted waters," Modica said. "Everything is wide open."

In one breakout group, the participants seemed to appreciate that point.

Several suggested applying legal pressure against the federal government, if nothing is done to clean up the offshore water pollution - from either the Los Angeles River or from a lack of action on reconfiguring the breakwater.

Businessman John Morris, owner of Smooth's bar-restaurant in downtown Long Beach, said he takes some customers/clients to neighboring beach towns "for a good beach experience."

Another resident quipped that a breakwater off San Diego would destroy that city's attractiveness.

"It's comical that we have to prove anything," he added, seriously, referring to complaints of poor water quality, poor wave action, poor attendance along Long Beach's shoreline.

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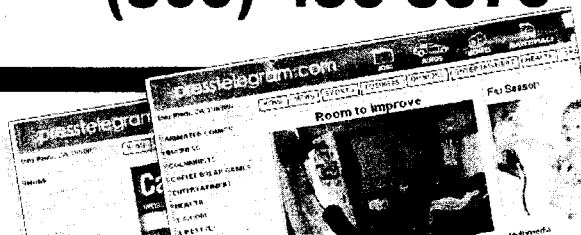
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